UNDERMINING NAPOLEON: THE ROLE OF METTERNICH

BY

MAYME JOSEPHINE BUNCH

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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1945

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UNDERMINING NAPOLEON: THE ROLE OF METTERNICH

Count Clemens Metternich was sent, in the summer of 1806, to represent the Austrian Empire at the French capital. He remained as ambassador there until 1809, and returned for a time the following year when Napoleon married an Austrian Archduchess. The three years Metternich spent as ambassador to Paris appear very brief beside the thirty-nine years he spent as Foreign Minister of Austria, and it is therefore natural that most studies of the Austrian statesman's life and career treat his ambassadorship very summarily. But while he was in Paris, Metternich was serving an apprenticeship for the more important task which he later undertook. He received valuable training and experience there, and formed friendships and associations which were to stand him in excellent stead afterward. The time he spent in Napoleon's capital and the observations he made there strengthened and confirmed Metternich's conservative political principles.

Metternich's career at Paris began under somewhat adverse circumstances. He arrived there only a few months after his country had signed a humiliating treaty of peace with the French government. He was obliged to represent a defeated power at the capital of its victorious former enemy—a difficult position at best. In addition, Metternich was forced to make himself agreeable to Napoleon, a ruler whose political background was most distasteful to him. He had not only to look after the immediate interests of his country at the French capital, but he had also to try to restore as much as possible of Austria's former prestige and power in international affairs. On a continent largely controlled by Napoleon, he must help to assert once more the supremacy of the Hapsburg Empire, and to establish the superiority of legitimate monarchies over governments sprung from revolutionary uprisings.

As ambassador to Paris, Metternich was directly responsible to the Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Philip Stadion, and to the Emperor Francis I. His despatches to the Foreign Minister not only kept the latter informed of events at Napoleon's court, but also gave advice concerning the relations which should be maintained between Austria and France—advice which became more and more important in the conduct of Austria's foreign affairs. Metternich was an excellent choice for the position of ambassador to France, for he was safely conservative in outlook, as befitted a representative of the Hapsburg monarchy; and at the same time his political background and previous experience had not been of sufficient importance to prejudice Napoleon against him. He was thoroughly acceptable to the French court, and in particular to the French Foreign Minister, Talleyrand. Metternich made a good impression upon French society generally, and created a favorable atmosphere in which to carry on his work of restoring Austria's prestige.

Metternich desired to see the return of his country to a position of power and security. He also wanted to see the restoration of a fairly equal balance of power among the great nations of Europe. He believed that such a balance was necessary to preserve the peace of the continent, and to prevent the French government from extending its control farther than it had done already. If such a balance could be restored by merely reducing the power of Napoleon and by making some sort of agreement with him which would give Austria, at least, equal authority with France in European politics, that method might be tried. But Metternich doubted, from the time he arrived in Paris, whether that would be possible; moreover, he was reluctant to see his country contract any alliance with the French ruler. He became increasingly convinced that the only way to make a permanent settlement with France and restore peace to Europe was to overthrow Napoleon and return the country to a legitimate ruler, preferably a Bourbon, with whom the other powers of Europe might deal on a more favorable basis. It was to this end that Metternich directed his political activities while he was in Paris.

He was very anxious that Austria remain on the best possible terms with France while preparations were being made for Napoleon's overthrow. He tried to avoid any direct challenge to the French Emperor's power until he thought that the challenge might have some chance of success. Meanwhile he sought to compromise and settle peacefully any disagreements which were likely to disturb the harmony between the two govments. Provoking Napoleon to war prematurely would accomplish nothing except Metternich's expulsion from the French court, the further defeat of the Austrian forces, and the loss of what political power the latter country still retained. It was Metternich's chief duty to see that any situation which might offer some benefit to his country was used to the best advantage.

Metternich found elements within the French government itself which were destined to prove helpful to him. He remarked that there was a decided gap between Napoleon's ambitions and those of some French officials. The close relationship between Metternich and Talleyrand was one evidence of such internal dissatisfaction within the Napoleonic Empire. Talleyrand had been an advocate of favorable treatment for Austria before Metternich ever came to Paris, and was thus an obvious Frenchman for the young diplomat to cultivate. His long career in the government of France under a series of different regimes had made him one of the most able statesmen on the continent. Furthermore, Talleyrand came to believe as Metternich did that overthrow of Napoleon was essential. Metternich thought it essential to the peace and security of Europe; Talleyrand thought it essential to his own future advancement. Talleyrand gave many evidences of his devotion to Metternich's cause while he was Foreign Minister of France; some of the evidences, his actions at the Erfurt conference for example, went beyond the bounds of loyalty to Napoleon. Talleyrand resigned as Foreign minister in 1807, in protest against the policies of his Emperor, and he was entirely removed from Napoleon's government early in 1809. Nevertheless, he remained in close touch with Metternich so long as the latter was in Paris, and even after he went back to Vienna to become Foreign Minister of Austria. From the time Metternich first presented his credentials to Tal-

leyrand in Paris in 1806 until, after Napoleon had been defeated, they co-operated to restore the Bourbons to the French throne, the association of these two men was of the utmost importance to French politics.

Metternich did not center his activities against Napoleon entirely upon dissatisfaction within France itself. He believed that the surest way to bring the Corsican's rule to an end was to defeat him in a military campaign, thus destroying some of the glamour which surrounded his name, and possibly giving impetus to the action of the dissatisfied groups in France as well. The military defeat which Austria had suffered in 1805 indicated that she could not, at least at the time Metternich arrived in Paris, hope to overcome Napoleon alone. The best chances of the Hapsburg government, therefore, lay in acquiring alliances with other European powers which were likewise interested in seeing the Bonaparte government brought to an end. Metternich set himself to investigate fully the possibilities of such alliances.

He considered whether the German states, largely under Napoleon's control in the Confederation of the Rhine, could be brought once more under the authority of the House of Hapsburg. There was much discontent with French administration and French plunder in the Confederation states. Metternich urged his government to encourage any nationalist symptoms which the German states displayed. He did not advocate the restoration of the old Holy Roman Empire, which had been abolished in 1806; for he was aware that such a move would probably arouse the displeasure of many German princes. But he felt that some sort of loose confederation might be established under Austrian control, which would be acceptable to the other German states. Metternich was anxious, too, that Austria rather than Prussia should take the lead in any German nationalist movement; in this desire, he echoed the long-standing rivalry between the Hapsburgs and the Hohenzollerns.

Metternich had no objection, certainly, to accepting Prussia's help in eliminating Napoleon from European politics, providing that help should be offered. But after the defeats of the Prussian armies by the French in the campaign of 1806-1807, he ceased for a time to regard Prussia as a very probable source of

assistance. Not until the final coalition against Napoleon was Austria actually linked with Prussia in military alliance. Meanwhile, Metternich kept in close touch with writers and publicists of nationalistic leanings throughout Germany. He encouraged such men, like his friend Friedrich von Gentz, to continue their work of stirring up German feeling against the French government. He dropped hints and suggestions to German notables who might take an active part in the movement, such as the Prince Primate, Karl von Dalberg.

In spite of his efforts, Metternich was unable to succeed in building up any alliance within Germany. His own country's government seemed to be very heitant in the matter. Francis I was too much afraid of rousing the jealousy of other German princes, and of stirring up troubles in his own non-German territories to interest himself very much in the project. Metternich was forced, therefore, to turn his attention more closely to other states which might assist him to overthrow Napoleon's government.

One state which Metternich always considered as a possible ally was Russia. In spite of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, which appeared to draw France and Russia closer together, Metternich continued to advocate friendly relations between his country and the Russian government. He put his own recommendations into practice in his friendship with the Russian diplomats in Paris, Tolstoy and Nesselrode. Even after the Tilsit agreement had been supplemented by the arrangements made at Erfurt when Napoleon and Alexander I of Russia held a meeting there, Metternich remained convinced that France and France alone was the state against which the Hapsburgs ought to direct their armed might. He never regarded Russia as an enemy, but rather as a friend temporarily separated from Austria by force of circumstances, but which might yet be united with the latter power to bring about the downfall of Napoleon. Metternich was convinced of the potential friendliness of the Czar's government, and pointed out that the Russian diplomats were consistently friendly toward him, even in spite of Napoleon's persistent efforts to stir up dissention between Russia and Austria. The failure of the Czar's government to join Austria in a war against

France in 1809 was certainly disappointing to Meternich, for he thought that concerted action by the Hapsburgs and the Romanovs was the surest way to defeat Napoleon. It is significant that such concerted action was used in the campaigns which finally did end the Bonaparte regime in Europe.

The thing which finally convinced Metternich that he need not wait for assurance of help from another power before Austria attacked Napoleon, was the war in Spain. French troops were occupied there, and after an English army was sent into the peninsula, it was apparent that they would continue to be there for some time to come. Meanwhile, the force that Napoleon could send against a country which attacked him from the east las limited. Metternich therefore advised his superiors in Vienna to declare war against France while the Spanish rebellion was undermining the strength of the Grand Army. He was very optimistic in his estimate of Austria's chances in the war, and was evidently certain that Napoleon's long awaited defeat was about to occur. In accord with his advice and information, the government of Austria went to war with France in April, 1809.

It was speedily apparent that Metternich had been entirely too sanguine in his opinion that Austria would be able to defeat France. On the contrary, the French armies entered Vienna a little more than a month after the beginning of hostilities. Metternich was allowed to return to Vienna and took up the duty of carrying on the peace negotiations with France, which, when they were finally signed, were unfavorable to Austria, but by no means fatal.

Shortly after his return from Paris after the war of 1809 was ended, Metternich became Foreign Minister of Austria in Stadion's place. It was as Foreign Minister that he was able, at last, to bring about the series of alliances with foreign powers which enabled Napoleon's overthrow to be accomplished.

While he was ambassador to France, and after he became Foreign Minister in his own country, Metternich showed himself to be one of the foremost diplomats of his age. He maintained himself in a difficult position while he was in Paris, and his self-possession and courteous conduct offered a striking con-

trast to the rages and fulminations in which Napoleon indulged. The fact that he was liked and respected by his colleagues and associates in Paris is a tribute to the way in which he conducted himself there.

Metternich had gone to Paris in 1806, convinced that the Napoleonic Empire was a menace to the peace and political stability of the European continent, and that it should be overthrown as soon as possible. The extension of the continental system, the overthrow of the Spanish Bourbons, the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and the reduction of Prussia from the ranks of a great power, all contributed to his conviction. He therefore set himself to hasten the French ruler's downfall in the capital of France. When the Emperor of the French resigned his crown in 1814, Metternich had the satisfaction of knowing that his efforts had been crowned with success.

Metternich's planning and diplomatic maneuvering had contributed to the downfall of Napoleon in various ways before the final collapse of the latter empire occurred. It is the purpose of this thesis to show the role which Metternich played in the politics of Europe in general and of France and Austria in particular from the time he went to Paris in 1806 until Napoleon signed the treaty of Fontainebleau in 1814.

In the preparation of this thesis, Metternich's *Mémoires*, which contain both his personal reminiscences and a collection of diplomatic correspondence relating to his public career, were of great value. Talleyrand's correspondence which has been published and is available in this country is of a strictly official nature, and gives very little of his personal opinion or impressions. Lacour-Gayet's excellent biography of Talleyrand furnished valuable information, and Dard's *Napoleon and Talleyrand* is another secondary work which gives a good picture of the political and diplomatic relations among the major statesmen of Napoleon's time. There is no very adequate biography of Metternich recently published, and no very good one in English of any date. The memoirs and correspondence of many of the members of Nalopeon's government and court were used, as well as the correspondence of both French and other European diplomats. Whenever possible, the information to be found in me-

moirs or autobiographies was checked against official diplomatic or miliary correspondence, particularly if the memoirs were written or published many years after the period under consideration, as was often the case. The correspondence of Napoleon and of his stepson and viceroy, Eugène de Beauharnais, was used extensively and proved to be very useful. It was necessary to confine the study to materials available in this country, since wartime conditions made research in European libraries and archives impossible.

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VITA

Mayme Josephine Bunch was born in Cairo, Illinois, on April 8, 1918. She attended the McClure, Illinois, grade school and Teachers' College High School at Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She attended Southeast Missouri Teachers' College from 1935 to 1938, and received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education. In 1939, she received the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Illinois. She taught history and political science in the high schools of New Madrid, Missouri, and Anna, Illinois, from 1939 to 1942. She attended summer sessions of the University of Illinois from 1940 to 1942, and has taught as a graduate assistant in the Department of History of the University of Illinois from 1942 to 1945.